

Jesus' Sayings That Challenge Us



SABBATH—MAY 3

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 5:48; Matthew 18:21, 22; Matthew 19:3–12; Luke 12:32–34; John 19:25–27.

MEMORY VERSE: “No one ever spoke the way this man does” (John 7:46, NIV).

SOME OF JESUS' SAYINGS ARE HARD TO ACCEPT: For example, Jesus says we are to turn the other cheek. In other words, we are not to resist (fight) evil. Of course, almost everyone thinks that we should resist evil as much as we can. *And to love those who are our enemies?* Should we not hate our enemies? It is friends and families we are to love, right? But Jesus says, “No!”

It gets even more confusing. Jesus says that the outcasts,¹ the harlots, and others like them will enter the kingdom of God before many of the righteous (holy) people. How can that be?

Jesus says that the blessed ones are the ones who weep, who are merciful, who are pure in heart. We thought the blessed ones were the rich, the powerful, those who have good looks and plenty of friends, right?

Even those sayings were not the most challenging to come from the lips of Jesus. This lesson examines a few of Jesus' *sayings*.

What did Jesus mean by these *sayings*? And how are we expected to use them in our lives today?

1. outcasts—people who are not accepted by members of society.

SUNDAY—MAY 4**ABOUT MARRIAGE AND HOLY LIVES (Matthew 19:3–12)**

Some of Jesus' hardest sayings deal with marriage and divorce. Read Matthew 19:3–12. What things are clear? What things are not so easy to understand? Even with what is not clear, what is the basic message that Jesus is giving here?

There is much to think about in the Pharisees² question. “‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?’ ” (verse 3, NIV). Of course, the answer is No. And Jesus makes that clear (verses 4–6). But the questioners' real reason shows up as we come to verse 7: “‘Why then . . . did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?’ ” Going ahead of Moses, Jesus makes it more difficult for a divorce. He comes down hard on those men with a desire for divorce. Unfaithfulness (not being true) in marriage is the only condition for divorce. Any other reasons would mean adultery³ (verses 8, 9). Shocked, the disciples jump into the discussion: “‘It is better not to marry’ ” (verse 10, NIV), they say.

Their answer inspires Jesus to give one of His most difficult sayings.

Who are those in Matthew 19:11, 12 that cannot accept Jesus' hard saying?

How do we understand Jesus' eunuch⁴ reference? How are the three groups of eunuchs to be explained? And what do they mean to us? Jesus' most puzzling sentence comes at the end: “‘The one who can accept living that way should do it’ ” (verse 12, NIV). Is this God's plan for people who are too weak to follow the high standard He outlined?

Sometimes there are things in the Bible that are hard to understand (2 Peter 3:16). Why is it so important not to get stuck on those things? Instead, we should focus on and live out what we do understand.

MONDAY—MAY 5**ABOUT FORGIVENESS (Matthew 18:21, 22)**

In an earlier lesson, we studied about Jesus as the perfect example of forgiveness. We return to the subject in this lesson. Read Matthew 18:21, 22.

Reflect on Matthew 18:21, 22.

2. Pharisees—a religious group of Jesus' day who believed a person must keep God's law to be saved.

3. adultery—the act of breaking the marriage vows by having sex with a person who is not one's spouse; not being faithful.

4. eunuch—a servant whose testes (male sex organs) have been removed so that he cannot have children or feel sexual desire when working around women.

What kind of wrong actions does Jesus have in mind here? How do we use Jesus' words in cases of sexual or physical abuse in the home? Did Jesus have very serious crimes in mind? One example is this: Someone kills a pregnant woman, opens up her womb, and steals her unborn baby (as happened in Melvern, Kansas, in December 2004). Could it be that Jesus is speaking to common people about common mistakes and hurts that we experience every day? Or is He giving a command for the more serious cases of human⁵ crimes? What does the Bible tell us?

She was known in the media as Girl X. She came to a Chicago court in a wheelchair. She raised her head and made eye movements to communicate. The 13-year-old testified (spoke) "about the attack in 1997 that left her seriously disabled. She was the third witness in the trial of Patrick Sykes, 29, who was accused of raping her, beating her, and pouring roach killer down her throat in the attack." —Adapted from Mike Robinson, Associated Press, *Washington Post*, March 24, 2001, page A22.

Forgiveness is never easy, especially when we have been so terribly wronged.

As you think about the situations above, do not forget Jesus' words on the cross: "Father, forgive them."

They don't [do not] know what they are doing' " (Luke 23:34, NIV). Think for a moment what this truly means and who this includes: Judas, the Roman soldiers, Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, chief priests, scribes, and you and me. What does this teach us about forgiving others? Bring your thoughts to class on Sabbath.



On the cross, Jesus prayed for His enemies.

TUESDAY—MAY 6

**ABOUT WEALTH AND GIVING
(Luke 12:32–34)**

To the rich young ruler who came to Him, Jesus said: "Sell everything you

5. human—of, or concerning, men, women, or children.

have and give to the poor' ” (Luke 18:22, NIV). Our explanation for Jesus' strong command is that He knew of this young man's need. Here Jesus put His finger on the one big block between the ruler and salvation:⁶ money. But does He give that same command to everyone?



The rich young ruler loved his money more than he loved God.

In Luke 12:33 Jesus seems to give all wealthy people the same command He gave the rich young ruler. “ ‘Sell everything you have. Give the money to those who are poor. You will have treasures in heaven’ ”(NIV).

How should we understand this saying? Was Jesus telling all Christians in all times to share wealth with the poor? What problems would arise if we followed His command 100 percent? Suppose in any chosen community, all Christians were to have sold all

their property and given their money to the poor. What would be their economic standing? How would they support themselves and their own families? And how would they get the money to take the gospel⁷ to new places?

Three thoughts may be helpful here. One is to study what really happened during Jesus' own ministry (work). His little group seemed to have had funds on hand. Judas kept them (John 12:6; John 13:29). A second thought is to take a careful look at what happened in the early church and among those Christians closest to the life setting of Jesus' statement. (In Acts 4:32–37 we learn how carefully they tried to follow Jesus' command.) A third thought is to examine what happened in the early church after the book of Acts. (In the letters of Paul, John, and Peter we find no large selling of property.)

When you think about the whole Bible (which does not criticize wealth) what do you think was Christ's point? How does Luke 12:34 catch the important part of His message?

WEDNESDAY—MAY 7

**ABOUT PERFECTION
(Matthew 5:48)**

For many people, one of Jesus' most puzzling statements comes in

6. salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life; being saved.

7. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sin.

the middle of the Sermon on the Mount: “ ‘So be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect’ ” (Matthew 5:48, NIV). Across many hundreds of centuries, good Christians have worked to reach the standard to which they thought Jesus Christ was pointing. They have tried to gain complete victory (a win) over the world, the flesh, and the devil. Some have beaten themselves with whips. Some have gone on trips to Christian places of worship. Others have tried it through the strictest keeping of the law. The goal is worthy in every case. But is that what Jesus was calling for in Matthew 5?

Compare⁸ the following pairs of verses. Notice how they inform and balance each other: Matthew 10:34–39 and Luke 14:26, 27; Matthew 7:7–11 and Luke 11:9–13; Matthew 5:48 and Luke 6:32–36.

The seemingly rough language of Jesus in Luke 14 is balanced out by reading Matthew 10. This gives us a better understanding of what Jesus was trying to say. Matthew 7 on prayer has Jesus promising us “good gifts” (verse 11, RSV) or “good things” (KJV), which may make us think of worldly things. But Luke has Jesus promising “the Holy Spirit” (Luke 11:13, NIV).

The same kind of reasoning takes place in respect to the final pair of verses. Matthew has Jesus saying: “ ‘Be ye therefore *perfect*’ ” (Matthew

5:48). But Luke reports His words as: “ ‘Be ye therefore *merciful*’ ” (Luke 6:36). According to the meaning of both versions, Luke’s comes closer to what Jesus meant. Luke speaks about loving our enemies and lending (loaning) without expecting anything back. Jesus says that doing things like that makes us “sons of the Most High, *because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked*” (verse 35, NIV). Then He quickly follows that with the statement: “ ‘Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful’ ” (verse 36, NIV). In Matthew the situation is the same. The verse on being perfect comes after talk of love to enemies, prayer for those who treat us wrongly, and about God sending rain equally on the righteous (saved) and the wicked. Jesus wanted to encourage us to be good and fair like our heavenly Father, who is kind to all and does not favor one person above another. That is what perfect means. The standard is high, but what higher standard can a Christian strive for?



We should give without expecting anything in return.

8. compare—to show how two things are the same.

THURSDAY—MAY 8**ABOUT FAMILY (John 19:25–27)**

A young woman joined David Koresh's⁹ group back in the 1990s. She was at the group's Waco, Texas, property when her mother passed away in Canada. As she prepared to leave for the funeral, the religious leader prevented her from going. No need, he said, to waste time and funds for such worldly things. There are more important things to do on the grounds. She never went.

Read the following sayings of Jesus: Matthew 10:34–37; Matthew 12:46–50; Luke 9:59–62; Luke 12:49–53; Luke 14:26. How would you answer the charge that they give aid and comfort to popular, but false, leaders like Koresh (and others), who say that natural family ties and loyalties are not important?

“This re-shaping of family values is driving a wedge [split] between the earth and heaven. . . . It becomes an important theme in Luke's Gospel.¹⁰ . . . There are statements about all who keep God's word as true family members (8:19–21; 11:27, 28). Luke's Jesus lays down the shocking command to ‘hate father and mother’—even to the point of leaving a dead father to bury himself!—as a condition (requirement) for discipleship¹¹

(9:57–62; 14:25).”—Adapted from F. Scott Spencer, *What Did Jesus Do?* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2003), page 35.

Jesus' statements seem rough to modern readers. But are they really so, when you understand what they mean? In the case of letting “the dead bury their own dead” (Luke 9:60, NIV), did the father of the future disciple (follower) really die? Or was that person just saying: “‘I will follow you after my father dies, and I have inherited [received] all the property’”? And how should we understand Jesus' statement in Luke 14:26 that no one can be His disciple who “‘does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—and, even his own life’” (NIV)? In yesterday's lesson, Matthew helps us better understand Jesus' meaning here. Jesus was talking in the Matthew verse about those who love father and mother and wife, and so on more than Him (read Matthew 10:37). “In the Bible, ‘to hate,’ often should mean ‘to love less.’”—Adapted from *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 5, page 811. Jesus was trying to explain that it is important to make God more important than family members.

Oftentimes our family bonds are the strongest earthly bonds that we know. But why must God always come first, even before family?

9. David Koresh—a cult leader who caused all members of his group to die in an attack against them in Waco, Texas, U.S.A.

10. Gospel—one of the four books in the New Testament that tells the story of Jesus' life and His teachings. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels.

11. discipleship—the practice of accepting Jesus and following Him.



Jesus asks that we love Him more than anything else.

FRIDAY—MAY 9

ADDITIONAL STUDY: No question, some of Jesus' sayings are hard to understand. This is very true if we do not compare them with other verses. But suppose we compare them with other statements that balance them out. Many of them will become much easier to understand. Even then we must understand that following Jesus cannot be a halfway thing. We have a choice: We give ourselves to Him completely. Or we do not give ourselves to Him at all.

"Celibacy¹² is not the ordinary, normal state. It is the devil's trick that it can lead to a higher level of holiness. The Jews looked and frowned upon celibacy as something pitiful. Celibacy was practiced by extreme religious groups such as the Essenes.¹³ . . . The Bible clearly shows that Peter was married. And maybe the other disciples

were married, too. . . . Jesus never recommended celibacy, either for Christians as a group or for Christian leaders. It is not natural. It does not contribute to the growth of character in the way that normal married life can."—Adapted from *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 5, pages 455, 456.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ The above statement on celibacy seems to have a certain religious culture in mind. But in what ways might it bring discouragement to ordinary Christians who are single or widowed? Or to those who choose to be celibate? In what ways can we support people who have made that choice?
- ❷ Bring your answers to Monday's final question to class and discuss the question of limits on forgiveness.
- ❸ To read verses about how God must come first, even before family, is one thing. But to really use the faith to put Him first is another story. In most churches around the world, there probably will be people who have been rejected (refused) by their families because of their faith. What about your own church? Is there anyone there who has lost family because of his or her faithfulness to Jesus? If so, how can you, as a church family, help give them support?

12. celibacy—the practice of avoiding marriage or sex for reasons of keeping oneself holy.

13. Essenes—a member of a brotherhood of Jews in Palestine from the second century B.C. to the second century A.D.